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BIRKENHEAD

Government School of Art.

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27 Nov

DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZES,

IN THE MUSIC HALL.

*Sumptuous
Art B.*

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SPEECH —

OF THE

VERY REV. THE DEAN OF CHESTER.



REPRINTED FROM THE "BIRKENHEAD GUARDIAN."

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BIRKENHEAD GOVERNMENT
SCHOOL OF ART.
DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZES.



On Friday evening, the 30th Oct., 1868, the prizes to the successful students belonging to this school were delivered, in the Music Hall, Birkenhead, by the Very Rev. the Dean of Chester, Dr. Howson. There was a large and respectable attendance. Mr. James Taylor, chairman of the committee, presided, and amongst those present were Mr. John Laird, M.P.; the Revs. Canon Knox, P. L. Sandberg, T. F. Redhead, H. P. Linton, C. Fenton, and A. M. Symington; Messrs. C. G. Mott, J. M. Hay, M. Laird, W. E. Hinde, J. Townsend, Colonel Clay, Maxwell Scott, Dr. Brindley, Dr. Higgins, Dr. Vale, W. Cameron, T. Williams, &c., &c.

The Chairman, in opening the proceedings, said it was with considerable reluctance that he presumed upon such an important occasion to occupy the chair. He would have been much relieved if some other individual more able than himself had been asked to do that duty; but in bowing to the expressed desire of the committee, and whilst he endeavoured to do the best he could in presiding at that meeting, he must cast himself upon their kind indulgence. He (the Chairman) then said that next to the religious and moral training of a community stands forth in a very prominent manner the improvement of that intellect of which man may be proud, and which it is his duty to cultivate and strengthen by all the means that may come within his reach. The Great and Wise Disposer of all good has so arranged for us that a child is not too young to know and love his Creator, and to reverence his superiors, by walking in the paths of true religion. But by straining the intellect with abstruser subjects at too early an age without religion, the youth intended for a long and useful life may find in ripen years he has made a wrong beginning; and therefore he (the Chairman) said, let religion and morality be studied first, and let art and science follow. He maintained that a great deal of our nation's wealth and prosperity depends upon this arrangement of things. He next observed that the first schools of art were established in 1842, but it was not until 1851, the year of the great exhibition in our metropolis, that they received an impulse which from that time to this has proved of immense

advantage to our country. And from the fact that our youth are taking advantage of the instruction of an evening afforded by these institutions, it has been ascertained that many of them now occupy much better positions in life than they otherwise would have done. The Chairman then continued to say that those who had read the report of 1866 would find an extract from a speech made by our much honoured and learned friend Dean Howson, (present there that evening) to the effect, that a great many languages are spoken in the countries with which the trade of the port is connected, and it requires much time to learn even one language; but a man who can draw, can write a language which is understood everywhere. The chairman said he could give them an example of this. About three weeks ago a Dutch captain came to his (the chairman's) works, accompanied by his chief engineer. The captain had a smattering of English, and could easily interpret the ordinary language of his country, but not being an engineer himself had some difficulty in readily interpreting the technical terms used by his engineer, who had no knowledge of English. The engineer, discovering some embarrassment, took out his pocket book and made a sketch of what he meant to convey through the captain, and he in return took a piece of chalk, and drew the object full size; and great was his delight when he found he was understood. The School of Art being connected with Kensington, the chairman said he could recommend this institution to the young men of this township, because the best examples are procured from the Art Department in London, which were especially adapted for evening classes, on whose account they were gathered together that evening. During this year we have received a large number, and already we have examples of one kind and another locked up in dingy presses, which for want of space are lost to the student and the public generally, for whom they are intended. Not only so, but for want of sufficient accommodation, all the pupils who offer themselves to the master, cannot be admitted. Only this month, eight young men wishing to attend the evening classes have been refused admission, and turned from the door. This (said the chairman) ought not to be the case in Birkenhead. (Applause.) Some two years ago we were in a position of great hope for this institution, having had the offer of £200 from our respected member, Mr. John Laird, a similar amount from another esteemed magistrate of this borough, which, with other subscriptions and Governmental aid, enabled us to see our way to within £900 of putting up a suitable building, sufficient to accommodate double the number of pupils to that which can be done on

our present premises; and until this is the case, the School of Art in Birkenhead cannot be said to be in its proper position, and without very strenuous exertions on the part of the committee, in all probability it would sink into oblivion. Since its commencement in this town it is like a ship in process of building, but not yet launched. (Applause.) There is an impression abroad that this school is for the benefit of the better classes only. It is not the case, for whatever advantage it may be to them, these paying higher fees, go a great way to assist the general good of the school; but if we could only have a suitable building so as to admit a greater number of the artizan class, and once erected free of debt, there would be no need of the public subscribing towards its maintenance. And who would not wish to see this desirable object accomplished? Now, (continued the chairman) before introducing to you the very rev. Dean Howson, allow me to explain how the examinations are conducted. With regard to freehand the examination consists of some piece of well balanced ornament specially prepared for the occasion, which is always required to be enlarged or reduced in proportion to a given line, to guard against measuring. Prior to the time of examination, a printed form is sent to the committee, requiring the signature of five of their number undertaking to be present and conduct the examination. The sealed packets of papers are received by the local secretary the same day they will be required, each set of papers being opened at the hour appointed for the examination, and in the presence of the committee. They are given to the students in the order in which they are packed, so that no two students sitting near each other get the same papers, and the strictest silence is enforced. Before commencing to work the papers, the student must write his or her name, and the name of their school, and place a mark opposite any prize they desire, if successful, a list of which is given on every examination paper. One hour is allowed for each subject, and at the expiration of the hour the papers are collected and again sealed up and posted the same night, together with a certificate signed by three of the five members of the committee (who must be present in the room during the examination in each subject) that the rules of the department have been strictly observed in every particular. (Applause.) After a few further remarks, the chairman then introduced

The Very Rev. Dean Howson (who was warmly applauded) said he was very much obliged for the honour of the invitation which had brought him there to distribute the prizes that evening. He sup-

posed that he should not be deviating from his duty, if he in the first place made a few remarks which might have a tendency to make the value of Schools of Art more apparent, and also to encourage the students attending such schools. The chairman had made his task easy by the prefatory remarks to which he (the Dean) had had the pleasure of listening; still he thought he might be allowed to make a few observations before he proceeded to the pleasing task of distributing the prizes. (Applause.) As to any argument for encouraging the students, the prizes were more persuasive than anything he could say; still a school of art had great interest for the public at large, and there might be some persons there who were not so sensible of the value of such institutions as the students who were availing themselves of their benefits. By a school of art they meant an institution for the teaching of drawing and other branches of art on exact principles and by systematic methods. He said that at the outset, because there was a great difference between the Government schools of art and what they had been commonly given to understand by instruction in drawing. He had had a great deal to do with education; and he was able to say that in no branch of instruction was there such an amount of imposture as in that which related to drawing. It was important that he should state this, because many parents might be gratified by their children bringing home pictures of cottages, pigs, or donkeys as their own; it was important that they should know how much was done by the children themselves, and how much by the Drawing Master. (Loud applause.) Now the Government school of art gave *bona fide* instruction in drawing, beginning with the rudiments, and insisting on the rudiments being well taught before the higher parts are proceeded with. With regard to the help given by the Government, they were not to expect a large amount of money; but still help was given by such prizes as he would call attention to just now, and especially by putting good examples within their reach; and by supplying proper guidance they secured the teaching being conducted on safe methods. This was an important help furnished by the Government. It prevented blunders being made in the teaching, and it was a strong argument why they should contribute of their money to such institutions. ("Hear, hear," and applause.) Now he did not at all expect that every body there would agree with the theory he laid down with regard to drawing, when he said that every man and woman who was not blind, or who was not maimed in the hand, ought to learn to draw, and especially those who had not a strong taste for

it. That was a maxim which appeared to be paradoxical. But so far he thought all would agree with him, that it was important, in training the faculties which God had given them, they should have regard to all those faculties. Thus the training of the hand and eye was not a very unimportant part of education. Now, with regard to this training of the hand and eye, they could not do it by books. They might read books from the age of three years till they were seventy, but books would not give this training; and, in fact, a knowledge of books alone might induce a habit of inattention with regard to the objects in the world around them. Again, no study of language would give this training. Mathematics would not even do this; with the exception of geometry to a certain extent. He had often been very much struck with clever and well-educated people, how extremely insensible they were to the exact forms and appearance of the objects which presented themselves in life; and he believed that if they could get all their young people instructed to delineate with the hand what they saw with the eye, the education of the country would be very much advanced. If they wanted to see a thing as it was, the best way was to draw it. If they could draw it correctly then they must have seen it correctly. He did not, however, mean to say that all could draw equally well. He made these remarks as a practical school-master, having had considerable opportunities of watching the progress of education with young people of different characters. He would give one illustration of the want of observation even among those who had some claim to artistic skill. He knew of a picture which was drawn with considerable ability, but it had a cup drawn in such a position that they could see into it from below. He did not know what Mr. Bentley would say to a student who would draw a cup placed above the line of the eye, into which they were able to see. That showed that great artists might be defective in the observation of little things. This habit of early observing things as they are, and taking a pleasure in delineating them, led to other results. It fostered a love of nature. He held that those who were accustomed to examine the forms and colours of vegetable life had a higher enjoyment than those who did not discriminate one form and colour from another. He was speaking from his own observation. He remembered one day having an intelligent class of boys; for the Liverpool boys were generally intelligent, and no doubt the Birkenhead boys were intelligent too. In the course of a lesson in some English book the word "fern" occurred. There were 25 boys, he thought, in the room. It flashed across his mind that they did not

know what a fern was. He asked the first boy, and he did not know; he asked others and they did not know. At last one boy brighter than the rest said it was something like a rose. Now, here were 25 boys who had no conception of the meaning of the word fern. It was true they lived in a large town far from vegetable life; but he (the Dean) adopted this method,—he said to the boys that if they did not bring a fern to school by such a day they would be liable to punishment. Thus the boys were invited to go into the hedgerows and fields; and he hoped they there learned something beyond what they would learn in the streets of Liverpool. He once met with a lady who was surprised that he knew the oak from the elm, and the elm from the oak. (Laughter.) She considered this a mark of considerable ability. He ventured to speak confidently that in proportion as Schools of Art were fostered the habit of observation would be fostered also. (Hear, and applause.) The Chairman had said something about the evil of overstraining young minds. It was a great evil. A worse thing could not be done to a young child than to overstrain it by book-learning. In observing, however, the forms of nature, in classifying flowers for instance, there was no great strain of the mind. Many who were invalided, and who could not read, had derived great pleasure and renewed health from the study of the vegetable world. God seemed to be pleased to give them comfort and relief in the study of nature, when the harder study connected with books would be weariness and slavery. But learning to draw well was not merely part of the education which benefited them all, but it had the most distinctly useful and practical results. He might say in the first place, that drawing was a universal language, quite as well understood by the Hottentot, if he could draw, as by the Englishman, if he could draw, and might be made a medium of communication between them. The Chairman had given them a practical illustration of this. He had told them of a case which came under his notice where this power of drawing was a means of communication between two persons who could not otherwise have understood each other. But if they passed on to the great question of their English manufactures, they then at once saw the vast importance of instruction in drawing, and in the higher branches of art, to those occupied in industrial pursuits. Some communications had appeared in the newspapers on the subject since the Paris Exhibition; and he hoped the old English belief in the rule of thumb, which at one time was held by so many persons, had now passed away. By rule of thumb he meant the belief that an Englishman, by mere instinct,

could do more than a Frenchman who was educated. That was not true. No one who thought carefully on the subject but must know that in proportion as their working men and artisans were trained to observe the materials on which they were employed, and to delineate the forms that went to make the patterns of their manufactures, the better would their work be done, and as a consequence, the better would be the prices obtained, and the better chance this country would have for maintaining its own in the markets of the world. He was sure that no one doubted that the better their working men were educated, and the more their artisans were trained to the use of the eye and the hand, the better it would be for the mercantile property of England. He thought if there was one place more than another that ought to take a warm interest in schools of art it ought to be Birkenhead, which had yet, in a great measure, its reputation and prosperity to make. (Applause). In an ancient city, which had its recollections of the past, and so forth, there might be something in those recollections to lean on; but with Birkenhead all was in the future. To a place like Birkenhead, which had gone through many struggles, and might have to go through many struggles in the future, it was peculiarly important that all its educational appliances should be perfect, and especially in those branches which had a tendency to cultivate the mind and refine the taste. (Hear, hear.) Now if they wished to promote the interests of Schools of Art, there were two obvious methods of doing so. He had said that although the Government gave a good deal of indirect help, and some direct help too, still upon the whole their reliance must be upon themselves. The Government of this day went upon the principle of helping those who helped themselves. There were two ways in which Schools of Art could be promoted. The first was by the common method of liberal subscriptions, and the second by a large number of persons above those who came to be instructed in the evening coming to be instructed themselves in the daytime. He hoped that what he had said would encourage those who had leisure to come and attend the day classes, for it was the day classes, he presumed, which were remunerative. He had only to say, in conclusion, that they might have every confidence in these Government Schools of Art. In the first place they might have confidence in them because the teaching was good and systematic; it was honest teaching. (Applause.) In the next place they might have confidence in the Examinations. Nothing could possibly be more fair than these examinations. Those who drew the best obtained the prizes.

They might, also, have confidence in the Prizes themselves, which, he could truly say, were the best of their kind, and were well worthy of being valued by those pupils who had been fortunate enough to win them, and with whom he hoped to have the pleasure presently of making acquaintance. (Applause.)

Dean Howson then proceeded to deliver the prizes.

FREEHAND DRAWING.—Emily Evison, Annie B. Flett, W. J. Gibb, G. E. Gillard, Samuel Hancock, Edward Hickson, J. J. Hodge, George Jones, Mary Jones, Samuel Lamont, Henry Leighton, Kate Linton, Jane Mann, Bessie Nolan, Clara Phillips, J. Edwin Pryce, Maria J. Raine, John Richards, James Richardson, J. C. Sheppey, R. B. Sutcliffe, C. H. Townsend, Joseph Venables, Thomas Watson, William Williams, George Gill.

PRACTICAL GEOMETRY.—Isabella Bell, J. G. Bennett, John Hall, Samuel Hancock, Herbert E. Hardy, Maggie Haughton, Eliza M. Mann, John G. Stredder, R. B. Sutcliffe, Joseph Venables, Robert T. Milburn.

PERSPECTIVE.—Isabella Bell, Robert Dalzell, W. J. Gibb, John Hale, Thos. Haughton, James Richardson, A. R. Sutcliffe.

MODEL DRAWING.—F. J. Adams, James Flinn, W. J. Gibb, Selene Anne Legge, Kate Linton, Charles McLeod, John G. Stredder, R. B. Sutcliffe, Joseph Venables, William Williams.

MECHANICAL DRAWING.—C. V. R. Blandy, Robert Dalzell, H. B. McFarlane, Charles H. Price.

The following students having obtained the mark "excellent" in one or more subjects of the second grade received prizes, the others received certificates:—Isabella Bell, W. J. Gibb, Samuel Hancock, Maggie Haughton, Samuel Lamont, C. H. Price, James Richardson, R. B. Sutcliffe, Joseph Venables, Robert T. Milburn, and William Williams.

The following students having passed in four or more of the above subjects received full certificates of the second grade:—C. F. R. Blandy, Albert R. Sutcliffe, W. W. Baldwin, John Hale, Isabella Bell, and Thomas Houghton.

Sixty students submitted upwards of 400 drawings in the different sections of study through which they are passing for inspection in London. The following received special mention by the examiners:—W. Atkin, I. Bell, Ann B. Flett, Agnes Galloway, John Hale, E. Hickson, E. E. Jones, Thomas Kenwright, Mary Jones, James Richardson, John G. Stredder, A. R. Sutcliffe, Joseph Venables, Wm. Williams, David Blair, C. F. R. Blandy, R. Dobson, W. J. Gibb, John Evans, and T. Houghton.

The works of C. F. R. Blandy and R. Dobson were selected for national competition, and the following were awarded prizes:—Agnes Galloway, Isabella Bell, Thomas Houghton, Thomas Kenwright, David Blair, A. R. Sutcliffe, and John G. Stredder "honourable mention."

The following were awarded "free studentitutes" for one year:—David Blair, C. F. R. Blandy, R. Dobson, and John Evans.

Dr. Higgins proposed a resolution to the effect that the school of art was worthy of support and extension.

Colonel Clay seconded the resolution, which was supported by the Rev. Canon Knox and carried unanimously.

On the motion of Mr. Mott, seconded by Mr. J. M. Hay, a vote of thanks was passed to the Dean of Chester for his attendance that evening; and Dr. Howson having briefly acknowledged the compliment, the proceedings closed with a vote of thanks to the chairman, on the motion of Mr. J. Laird, M.P.

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